# Best Sellers Yield Fortunes for Their Clever Authors

## Edith Wharton, Zane Grey, Harold Bell Wright, May Sinclair and Zona Gale Among Leading Royalty Earners

Group of five authors whose work brings them fortunes. In oval at left: Mrs. Edith Wharton; at right, Zane Grey. In panel in centre, Harold Bell Wright; in circle, Robert W. Chambers. Below, Mary Watts (at left) and Natalie Sumner Lincoln.

FOR the first time in the history of American book publishing the American book—novel, serious work, poetry—has distanced its European rival and, commercially at least, it has reached the top.

This statement, made on the authority of a number of publishers, among whom are some whose roots are still in England, is curious because it is only a few generations ago when books written in this country by its citizens were sneered out of existence in Europe.

"American books! Are there such things?"

This was a common exclamation in supercilious England before Hawthorne went there as Consul to Liverpool, and although a few general readers made the great American author an exception it remained the common exclamation pretty nearly down to the present time. England, even literary England, is very conservative; along in 1913-1914 she discovered Ella Wheeler Wilcox (literary England stood aloof from this discovery, it must be owned), gave her a laurel as "the American poet" and bought her books by the million.

### *American Authors Riding Wave of Commercial Success*

Whether England and her colonies have yet heard of Harold Bell Wright or not she will hear of him and buy him as numerously as his fellow citizens in the South and West have done. She has had obscure "best sellers" of her own and made them extraordinarily rich, and she doesn't bear malice when she fails to put them "over" on us, thinking, perhaps, that, having succeeded in planting Marie Corelli here, enough rapport has been established for the present.

Whatever the future may hold, the fact of the present is that American authors have the ear of their countrymen and in consequence are selling better than the authors of Europe. Respectable fortunes, even for these days of great incomes, are the reward of popular authors and a half dozen or more have been carried into the millionaire class by their pens.

To designate these supposedly happy writers by name and habitation is the purpose here—an avowedly sordid, money spirited purpose as remote as possible from literary criticism. And at the tip-top of popularity and commercial success should be set Harold Bell Wright, who has just been taken over by contract, said to be the most liberal ever signed by a publishing house, by the New York firm D. Appleton & Co.

This California writer was born in Rome, N. Y., in 1872, and after a fluke at painting and decorating became a pastor in the Christian Disciples, serving congregations in Pierce City, Mo.; Chicago, Kansas City and Redlands, Cal. A year before he retired from the ministry he issued a novel called "The Shepherd of the Hills." This was in 1907. Before he put out his third book a company was formed in Chicago in which he was interested to push his output in a strictly commercial way. He was advertised, as the report goes, throughout the South and West "like a new soap."

### *Tactics Prove Their Merits in Record Breaking Book Sales*

These tactics proved enormously successful, especially in the interest and sale of the book, "The Winning of Barbara Worth" (1911). The sales of this book reached a number so large that it swallows up the big figures that used to be placed after the books of one E. P. Roe, also a minister and popular novelist, as a whale swallows a school of minnows. It is estimated that 1,500,000 copies of this novel were sold in the three years preceding the war, and putting his royalty basis and his interest in the book concern at 20 per cent., which is probably far below what he did receive, the author profited by this one book in the sum of $300,000.

The sales of Wright's latest published novel, "The Re-creation of Benjamin Kent" almost doubled those of the novel of 1911, but with the increase in the cost of publication it may be doubted if his money return from this second phenomenally popular book doubled that of the Barbara Worth novel, and it may be conjectured also that as he was a sort of partner in the publishing end he did not benefit by the increased price of the book as an author with a regular publisher might do. Perhaps it was this feature of the business that persuaded Harold Bell Wright to go with Appleton. That house will bring out next August his new story, "Helen of the Old House."

The publishing house guard the secret of their contract with Wright, but do not attempt to conceal satisfaction in it. There is no doubt in their minds that the new book will do as well as if not better than any one of its five predecessors and they were doubtless sure of this when they made the Wright contract. No author in this country has ever had an offer so magnificent, yet it took some persuasion to bring this one into the conventional fold.

"In every small town in this country," said the Appleton representative, who had most to do with putting through the negotiations, "Harold Bell Wright is the writer they know and love. They watch for a new book from him with a veritable longing and with every new novel his vogue grows. I wager you couldn't go into a town of 6,000 inhabitants in the West and South without finding that 5,599 have read books by him. In two-thirds of the homes you would find his books; the people buy 'em and keep 'em."

The last assertion was made as if it were a curious thing, as perhaps it is.

Among the authors who have made money recently under the Appleton aegis is Edith Wharton. Her "Age of Innocence" is a best seller, just as her "House of Mirth" of a former day and under a different publisher was. Mrs. Wharton's royalties—and almost from the beginning she has demanded and obtained the highest paid—are believed to exceed $25,000 on this novel, which has still years to sell in. It would be curious to know how the successful modern author felt when "toting" up such generous figures. Probably they take the money as a matter of course, and not on knees of gratitude, as George Eliot did when she received a royalty check of $10,000 from America.

English writers who are popular here still have a better chance to make money than their American cousins. Or they have additional chances. Wells, Barrie, May Sinclair, to instance but a few well known names, make two contracts, one with the American and the other with the English publisher. This is true even when the American house is a branch or an output of the English one.

May Sinclair's income from royalties since the appearance and great sale of "Mary Olivier" is over $15,000 a year. This is made up more largely from the continuous sales of her early books, "The Divine Fire" and "The Three Sisters." Each new book as it is talked about, heralded and criticised in the case of every author with an acknowledged audience, revives a sale of its predecessors. Miss Sinclair is reported to have received in British gold and American greenbacks for the psychological study mentioned a sum in excess of $50,000.

But here is a woman who makes even more money by her pen and, it is safe to say that a number of persons who belong to the class that describes itself as "not reading the books but never missing a review," never even heard of her. She is Natalie Sumner Lincoln, who lives and wields that aforesaid pen in Washington, D. C. Her stories are baffling mystery tales that nobody can guess, as her publishers say. "The Red Seal" sold up in the hundred thousands, and her next to appear, which is called "The Unseen Ear," undoubtedly will beat that figure, because the publishers mean to use all their powers to make her more widely known. At present they are themselves a trifle vague about where her vogue lies. Here is a bit of help to them thrown by the way.

The claim is made, by Zane Grey's publishers that his novel of the 1920 vintage outsold all others, and they are sitting back to see the sales of his book of this year creep steadily up on the best sellers and at last beat them by a nose. This popular writer has no cause to complain of a slow awakening of the public to his swift moving narrative. The people liked his Western stories from the start and they have bought a sufficient number of them to make Zane Grey a pretty good picture of a millionaire.

When the embryo author came first to New York he arrived in the guise of a dentist, a calling seemingly the last that this athletically inclined individual would take up. While this job held him he exercised on the baseball field of his home in the Oranges, New Jersey. Only when he was playing ball did he feel free, but a successful book filled with the wind of the West and the spirit of the Rockies helped him to a genuine enfranchisement.

From his royalties Grey has acquired a house with plenty of embellished acres at a cost of $225,000, and a more recent purchase has been a stock farm valued at $200,000.

Perhaps there is a general vagueness of understanding what an author's royalty is and how it is computed. People see a book copyrighted by its publishers and are puzzled to know what the author's property consists of if not a copyright. Well, he parts with it serially, perhaps, to a magazine and in book form to a firm of publishers. The former gives him a lump sum for the privilege of printing his work and the latter contracts to pay him a percentage on every copy of the book sold. The publishers may advance him a sum of money. This money, which they, properly enough, call an "advance," is not a bonus; the sales of the book must work it out before he gets any more "royalty."

When a new author approaches a publisher with a manuscript he isn't apt to receive an advance, and in many cases the publisher's contract reads that 1,000 or more copies are to be sold before his royalty begins. This is to protect the publishers for their original outlay of typesetting, stereotyping, printing, binding, &c., which make the cost of publishing. Then he is offered, say, 5, or 7, or 10 per cent. as royalty on every book sold in excess of the reserved number of copies. If it doesn't sell in excess, and this has been known to happen in volumes of poetry and fiction, then the author has had his labor for his pains.

But an author who has "arrived" makes a very different treaty with his publisher. He demands and receives an advance calculated on his supposed or real popularity. He demands also as large a percentage in royalty as the publishers can bear without swooning. Sometimes he gets what he asks, but generally there is dickering and whittling down of the terms he proposes.

### *H. G. Wells Gains Reputation For His Business Ability*

H. G. Wells has the reputation of an excellent business man when he sells his own wares. The advance sum he asks is very large and the percentage of royalty is computed at the very highest mark the book will stand. But this English author has written so much and so variously that he has assembled a really vast audience, and publishers know this just as he does. Besides his contract with an English publishing house anxious to bring out a book by him he has one with the American house who wants to do the same thing here. Because the two houses may be allied makes no difference in Wells's attitude towards them.

No better proof of his strength with the public and consequently with the publishers could have been given than was furnished by his plain history of life and mankind, "The Outline of History." This work is in two thick volumes, illustrated, and sells for $10.50. To bring it out meant a big outlay of money, but probably most of the publishers of the day would willingly have taken the risk.

The book has had a fine sale. The first edition, issued last November, sold as soon as it came from the presses; the second, issued three weeks later, was exhausted before publication; the third edition was sold out on December 5, the fourth, an edition of 10,000, repeated this feat, and there have been three larger printings since. Perhaps no historical work has been so popular since Macaulay's "History of England" was published. That, too, as it came out two volumes at a time, was absorbed by the public instantly.

Now, what did Wells get in money return? He has already received in royalties, including the very large advance demanded by him, between $30,000 and $40,000, and the sale of the book, not yet three months out, has, it may be said, only begun. Some idea of what have been the returns of a popular novel by the inexhaustible Wells, a novel like "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," which swept like a fire about the English reading world, may be formed by knowing what a book of history, necessarily limited in its appeal, has done. Putting an anomaly like Harold Bell Wright out of the consideration, Wells has probably earned more money than any other living author.

Rudyard Kipling once held the proud position of getting the biggest advances and the best arrangements among English writers. He still commands big money for anything he wishes to sell in the literature kind, but he never bothered with such details himself. Mrs. Kipling, who was Josephine Balestier, a Vermonter, has made contracts for him since the publication of "The Light That Failed." His American publishers grudgingly admire her as a true sport at a bargain. It is their belief that she always got the best end of the bargain.

The precursor of the small town story, which is admirably American and singularly interesting to most persons, for most persons come from small towns, is claimed to be Zona Gale's "Miss Lulu Bett," from which a play, apparently as absorbing as the story, has been made. This author had done clever work before and pleased the critics, but she didn't scoop in readers until this book appeared. It has been a best seller and brought her a tidy sum of real cash.

Following it comes a much discussed book, that by Sinclair Lewis, called, "Main Street." It is in the best seller class also and rapidly approaching the 100,000 mark. When it does the young author can count up his royalties and find that they approach an amount between $15,000 and $20,000.

### *Some Financial Successes Scored by Scientific Works*

Rare successes, when the term is restricted in meaning to our narrow money terms, are books of a serious or edifying nature. Two such appear on publishing lists of the day. They are John Bass's "The Peace Tangle" and Edward Slosson's "Creative Chemistry." The Century Company announce that they have sold 60,000 copies of the Slosson work and the Macmillan Company put the former title along with their novels that are in the best seller class.

## Surprising Facts About Authors' Returns Gathered From Publishers---H. G. Wells and Blasco Ibanez Good Business Men

Poetry, once fled from by canny publishers, now finds an ear turned in its direction. The reason is, poetry sells. Masefield, with his virile sea and animal stories in verse, is responsible for some of the newly developed masculine interest in song, and the war is more responsible. This without elucidation may serve as a prelude to a statement made by the publishers of "Domesday Book," a thick volume of blank verse by Egdar Lee Masters, author of "Spoon River Anthology."

Although the critics were not kind to "Domesday Book," it has gone ahead selling until it merits a place in the popular procession. It would go up nearer the head, say the knowing, were it not for the price—$4.50 is a good deal of money to pay for a volume of new poetry while children's shoes continue to come so high.

Kathleen Norris, Louis Tracy, Basil King, James Oliver Curwood, Harold McGrath, Cosmo Hamilton—these may be classed together, however different they are in style and merit, as popular authors who have been kindly received by the public but not spoiled by getting suddenly plutocratic.

Winston Churchill, Owen Wister, Booth Tarkington, Robert W. Chambers (same apologies as above will be considered as accepted) are believed by the public to have made more money and to hold that public by the buttonhole more firmly. Churchill is a millionaire without other visible means of support than is afforded by his pen. His books have a perennial sale and his income increases rather than diminishes as he grows older and is not affected by his failure to turn out a book a year. With Chambers the very reverse is true. His public is faithful and cordial as long as he works. They want new books by him and they generally get them. If Chambers is not a millionaire like the contemporary noted it is his own spendthrift fault.

### *Blasco Ibanez Sets the Pace For Foreign Novelists Here*

The money Blasco Ibanez collected in royalties for his translated novels in this country, beginning with the enormous sales of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," has been variously computed, but all computations approach the million dollar mark. A popular story to the effect that Blasco Ibanez parted with his rights to the novel mentioned for a small sum of money has been denied by his American publishers. As the Spaniard was no neophyte but a fledged author, famous in Paris as in Madrid, the denial seems to be the right version. It arose in the public mind possibly from a suit brought by the translator of "The Four Horsemen."

No foreign novelist in this or in the generation before this one has met with a like success, and this is denominated in money as well as fame. America liked Blasco Ibanez from the beginning and has because of this liking taken some queer creatures to its breast. His vogue has already lasted longer than usually happens in the case of a foreign and a Latin writer.

Every writer wants to be popular. Meredith sighed because the "people" didn't read him, and if what is hidden in a writer's breast suddenly became transparent and readable it would be seen that he wanted unrestricted audiences for his works. Unfortunately for such hopes, popularity is a gift like every other endowment; it can't be acquired. It is as much beyond certain writers as if they set down their thoughts in Sanscrit or other forgotten tongue instead of in English. But they may find audiences of their own, the "fit and few" that Alcott was contented with. Even such audiences, it would seem, pay enough so that their favorite authors can eat and have clothes to wear. The popular authors, who easily win greater worldly advantage, and toward whom this country is more than hospitable, often show discontent with their too quickly won and too quickly fading laurels. The author of a "best seller" would like to be a Henry James; that novelist yearned to be a popular playwright. So no one is smugly satisfied with himself in the literary world, and owing to this general discontent things get done.

## Psychologist Attributes Crime Wave To Prohibition and Economic Unrest

POLICE COMMISSIONER RICHARD ENRIGHT has a friend at court in the person of Dr. George O. Ferguson, Jr., professor of educational psychology of the University of Virginia.

Dr. Ferguson sides with New York's police chief in blaming at least part of Gotham's—and the nation's—crime wave upon the press. He says that printed accounts of the ease with which crime may be committed serve to stimulate criminal activities and increase the actual number of lawbreakers.

The Virginia psychologist furnishes a new academic explanation for the number of crimes committed, stating that the majority of malefactors are probably not old time offenders but rather men and women whom prohibition, post-war unrest and the present labor situation have forced over the border line of respectability into a life of crime. The blue laws and other measures restricting personal liberty, he says, are additional contributing causes.

"Americans have never accustomed themselves to the word *verboten*, says Dr. Ferguson. "Say 'don't' to a man and he naturally rebels. Germans would take with better grace the new restrictions that have been placed upon citizens. They have been brought up to obey orders and commands.

### *Sees Less Respect for Law As Result of Volstead Act*

"The after effects of the Volstead act have lessened the respect of the average man for American laws. The subnormal man, the man of small intelligence and the man on the border line of criminality is harmfully influenced when he sees Alderman Smith and Counsellor Jones defying the authorities by buying whiskey. He feels that if these leaders in the community have the right to break a Federal statute he can break a city ordinance.

"You can't make it a moral crime for a man to carry a pint of liquor, and laws that tend to turn petty vices into acts of moral reprehension are bound to meet with opposition. Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States and founder of the University of Virginia, said: 'The least government is the best government.' That has been the guiding genius of the American people. For a generation accustomed to prohibition the Volstead act would be an ideal statute, but for the present, at least, it is bound to cause trouble."

"The blue laws have made the near criminals see red. The near criminal naturally rebels at all restraint. He is, of course, weak. He wants to continue in his petty vices and dissipations. When these are suddenly made impossible he feels that he has a grievance against the world in general and against society in particular. Lawbreaking results.

### *Wage Reduction a Factor In Increasing Number of Crimes*

"High wages are being reduced, and your mechanic and skilled laborer who earned $10 a day last year has received a big cut in pay. He has developed wants for commodities which he cannot now gratify. He does not make the transition from comparative luxury and affluence to a lower scale of living with good grace. The good citizen cusses hard times and lets it go at that, but your near criminal says: 'Society owes me a living, and if society will not pay me what I am worth I am going to take it.' He then proceeds to turn foodpad.

"He has learned that it is easy to beat the law, that penalties for serious offences are light and that even if he is sent to prison welfare workers have seen to it that he is provided with comfortable quarters and humane treatment. The result is that he becomes a habitual criminal."

"This crime wave which nearly every large American city is experiencing is a real menace. It is hindering forward and progressive movements, such as the University of Virginia Centennial Endowment Fund. Wealthy citizens have become unduly alarmed at highly colored newspaper accounts which are actually inciting men to crime. They have come to believe that the spirit of unrest has increased far beyond its actual proportions.

"I believe that the crime wave will not be fully checked until the country experiences a return to normal economic conditions, until national confidence supplants national unrest and until the American people have learned to accept the Eighteenth Amendment as a part of the Constitution."

## Analysis of Traditional Ghosts Upsets the Popular Conception

MANY people who "do not believe in ghosts" would hesitate to spend a night alone in a haunted house. So strong is the effect of inherited tradition that it overcomes our common sense and, like conscience, makes cowards of us all. For the belief in ghosts is worldwide and of extreme antiquity. It exists to-day throughout the globe, among every race from the most primitive to the most highly civilized.

Popular beliefs die hard, and it is easy to understand that once the idea of ghosts had arisen it might continue to exist for countless generations. The difficulty is to explain how a superstition so contrary to common sense could have first arisen.

A new solution of the mystery has recently been suggested in "The Burial of the Dead." According to this latest theory, ghosts were originally not disembodied spirits but living men. A survey of superstitions throughout the world discloses the fact that there are certain characteristics common to the ghosts of all nations. Among other things, they suffer from hunger and cold. So the good natured Breton peasant, when he goes to bed at night, is in the habit of leaving a little food on the table and some fire in the grate so that the poor ghosts may eat and warm themselves.

Again, among many races it is believed that a ghost may be wounded or even killed, and it is not uncommon for savages to organize ghost hunts.

The same idea is prevalent in Europe with regard to vampires. A vampire, according to popular superstition, is the ghost of a dead man which leaves the corpse at night to go and suck the blood of living people while they sleep. The corpse may easily be recognized because it remains fresh, supple and ruddy; it will bleed when cut, and even move or shriek. The traditional method of "laying" a vampire is to drive a stake through the corpse or to cut off the head; in short, to *kill* it. These and other beliefs indicate that the superstition originally had reference to living men.

In the early ages of human existence times were hard and men were cruel. Small communities struggling for existence could not afford to support useless members, and the folklore of many races tends to show that the sick and injured and those who were too old or feeble to take their share of the hardships and dangers were driven out of the settlement and left to feed for themselves as best they could.

Their condition must have been pitiable in the extreme, and death must soon have come to them. But while they lived hunger must have driven them to return to the settlement in search of food. The most favorable opportunity to do so unperceived would be during the hours of darkness, and this precisely is the time when ghosts are said to walk — "the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn." At dawn they vanish; cock-crow is the signal for their retreat.

So the belief in ghosts records the efforts of those who had been driven out to return to their homes. But if they were living men how did the idea arise that they were dead? This is explained by what Max Muller called a disease of language. The men were not dead, but they were about to die. Primitive language may have had but one word to describe both, and in that monumental work "The Golden Bough" Sir J. G. Frazer mentions races living to-day who have only one word to describe the dead and the very old who are near death. So the poverty of primitive language led to the belief that it is the dead who return to haunt the living. This, in brief, is the theory put forward in "The Burial of the Dead," but it is not likely to find favor among spiritualists and the followers of Sir Oliver Lodge.